

43rd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT • ASSEMBLY DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS CHAIR

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Jorgensen's Journal: RTW A Fraud, Must Be Stopped

On Monday, January 19th, our nation paused to remember Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dr. King has a place among the great orators of American history, as so many of his words still hold meaning – and bear repeating - in society today.

While his speeches on civil rights are the most often quoted, in 1961, Dr. King also warned against so-called right-to-work (RTW) proposals, saying, "Wherever these laws have been passed, wages are lower, job opportunities are fewer."

He was right, of course.

Consider the case of Oklahoma, one of the more recent states which more recently adopted RTW, in 2001. Since that time, the state has lost 73,000 manufacturing jobs – more than half its jobs in that industry. And, Oklahoma's seen a decrease in new manufacturing business growth, by one-third.

Clearly, so-called right-to-work is not an economic engine. In fact, many of the business leaders who employ union workers here in Wisconsin say RTW will hurt them. More than 350 Wisconsin businesses have formed the Wisconsin Contractor Coalition to publicly oppose the idea, even though a bill hasn't yet been introduced. The impressive list includes major employers in my neck of the woods like J.P. Cullen and Sons and Rock Road Companies of Janesville. Bill Kennedy, President of Rock Road Companies, is serving on the WCC Board of Directors.

If there's one thing I've learned in my eight years as a lawmaker, it's that people like me don't have all the answers. Good legislators listen to the people they've been elected to serve. On this issue, we must listen – and what I hear is opposition.

Business leaders tell me RTW will interfere with their existing contracts – and that will cost them. You see, businesses – particularly in construction – choose to work with unions because unions provide skilled labor, safety training, health care, and other benefits. In essence, unions streamline the hiring process and human resources side of their business.

Thoughtful taxpayers have concerns, too. You see, unions currently provide the training and apprenticeship opportunities Wisconsin workers need to get jobs in high-demand industries. If the private money that unions use to run these programs dries up, the burden will fall to our technical colleges, costing all of us.



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And, of course, workers tell me RTW will make it harder for them to earn a living wage, get health care coverage, and support their families. Unions add value to their lives, too.

So, as I see it, RTW is a lose-lose-lose situation.

That's how Dr. King saw it. On that day in 1961, he raised his voice against so-called right-to-work, saying, "We demand this fraud be stopped. Our weapon is our vote."

Still today, I hear his call to action. I hear my district's opposition. And, I will vote against RTW, should it come before me.

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